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Subject: God, First.

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A Weekly Publication

OF

SERMONS

PREACHED BY

HENRY WARD BEECHER.



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HENRY WARD BEECHER.

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GOD, FIRST.

"And a certain scribe came, and said unto him, Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest. And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head. And another of his disciples said unto him, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. But Jesus said unto him, Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead."—MATT. VIII. 19-22.

Nothing can be further from the facts than the impression that Christ was a literal, methodical, practical teacher. That rigid and formal manhood which many of us associate with religion had in him no place. Over the depths of his life played a thousand ripples, as when the wind crumples the surface of the sea. His nature, boundless as the deep, did not come in upon ours with the full breadth and majesty of the ocean; but it touched humanity as the ocean touches the shores of the Continent, with curved bays and inlets shot far in, with bold promontories and rocks here, and next tranquil nooks and plashing shallows. All elements of beauty, whether in depth or brightness, are found along the edge where the land marries the sea.

The teaching of Christ is, therefore, full of paradoxes. His manner and conversation were full of surprises. If you were to use the term *proper* to signify a certain method of uniform dignity, then he was not proper. His conversation was versatile and ingenuous and sparkling. This is shown by the great attraction which it had to the common people, and to children, who were fascinated by him. His commands were sometimes plain as the very road which he traveled; but at other times his commands were obscure, and almost contradictory. He was no formal canal in straight lines, at every point the same monotonous channel of propriety. He was a river, full of changes, at no two points alike: here, full of tranquil depths, there rushing over stones or ledges, and again sweeping in grand curves, on either sides of which the scene changes. Trees, shrubs, flowers, grass, all by turns line the bank.

We shall not be surprised then, at such a remarkable scene as that

which is recorded in our text. First comes to him one of the scribes, saying, "Master I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest." Who were these scribes? They were the very chiefest men of the nation. After returning from the Babylonian captivity the people gradually lost the use of the Hebrew tongue. Therefore, the reading of the Word of God was of little profit in the Hebrew. Moreover, there were changes required to adapt it to the people and the time, and there had to be persons invested with authority to prescribe such changes. The scribes were the authorized keepers of the written law. They were the interpreters of that law, and also the conservators of all those interpretations which had been made.

As the law was the sum of the Jewish history and literature and philosophy, the scribes were the doctors, the professors, the most earnest students and scholars, and were looked up to by the people as we all look up to those who transcend in accomplishments and in that knowledge which is the most popular in any age, or among any particular people. There were none who were higher than the scribes in honor among the Jews.

It was a very striking thing, then, when one of this select band of honored Jews listening to the teachings of Christ, volunteered discipleship. Christ seemed to him, probably, a rare man, a prophet raised up from among the Jews; and he was desirous of putting himself under his care and instruction.

But the way in which this overture was met is still more remarkable. If one had desired to spread a secular philosophy, if one had come to institute a party, if one had attempted to organize, in other words, an outward kingdom, such an opportunity as this would not have been lost, to gather around about him influential followers—those that would give dignity and influence to his teaching. But our Saviour rejected him. He said to him, "The foxes have holes." Those universal enemies that are followed by universal enmity, and that therefore represent, in some sense, the very lowest things in creation among the animals—the poorest and the most hunted of all creatures—the foxes, have holes. They keep house; they have abodes that are suited to their nature and wants. And if there are any things that are comparatively useless to men, that are of very little account in the world, they are the birds, that take care of themselves, swarming in the woods or in the fields, and that, if noticed at all, are noticed only to be shot. Yet "the birds have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." It is as if he had said, "I am houseless; I am lower than the least of all these things." This was his reply.

In other words, he said to the man, "You have misconceived,

entirely. The kingdom that I came to establish is to have no such future as you anticipate. There is to be no such development as shall put you in a position of rank or title, or exalt you in influence, and so in wealth. I am lower than the lowest creatures, and shall abide so as to exterior matters. If you follow me, you must lift your expectation higher than you have done." And so he set him apart.

The next case is even more remarkable. The way in which the Saviour addressed the several applicants was the strangest way imaginable of gathering disciples. Luke tells us that he saw the young man, and commanded him to follow. In Matthew it appears as if the young man had proffered his own following. "Another of his disciples [by disciples was meant simply those that followed him for instruction: *disciple* and *pupil* are identical, meaning one that followed Christ for the purpose of being instructed] said unto him, Lord suffer me first to go and bury my father." If you put Luke's construction upon it, it is, "Christ said, Follow me; and he said, Lord suffer me first to go and bury my father. But Jesus said unto him, Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead."

This, evidently, was one who had felt the power of Christ's teachings, and the beauty of holiness. In his heart there had been a vague and yet strong desire for another and a better life. When he was singled out by the Master, and beckoned to become a permanent adherent, he interposed but one single condition. It is hardly possible to conceive of a condition which was better selected, and which would justify so well his request. "My father is dead: let me go and bury him, and then I will return and become a disciple." What does not a son owe to a father, or to a mother? and when, in all one's life, is it right that one should pause, that there should be vacation in business and vacation in pleasure, if not in that hour when we bestow the last testimony of affection and of honor upon those who have spent their years and their substance in rearing us to manhood!

Did Jesus undervalue the relation of father and son? Did he speak contemptuously of the grief of a mourning child, and of the sacred duties which he owed to his unburied father? Is it possible, with our sense of the infinite love and gentleness and delicacy of Christ's mind and our reverence for it, that we can for a moment suppose him to have indulged in anything so harsh as the language with which he is recorded to have repelled this young man? Instead of uttering any word of sympathy to the young man, instead of asking after his father, instead of speaking some comfort-

ing word to him, and bidding him Godspeed on so noble and natural and just an errand as this, he said to him, "Let the dead bury their dead : follow thou me." The thing itself seems sufficiently severe ; and this language seems severer and harsher still.

But, after all, we are to remember, first, that the whole conversation and all its connections, are not given in the Evangelist. No man can transfer to paper that which passes in life. The gesture, the posture, the expression, that which the eye speaks, that which the hand says, all that goes before, all that attends—the actual life—can never be reproduced by any description of life ; and this is signally true in the parables of our Saviour, the most of which hang strung together upon a thread, as separated from the circumstances as a pearl is from the place where it grew. We have to imagine, often, what it was that the parable illustrated in the history of Christ ; and in many of these historic instances all that went before, and all that accompanied, is omitted, and the barest bones, if I may so say, of the transaction, are saved. But, much as this case seems like bones unclothed of flesh, barren as it is, it will bear examination, and when we look at it from the interior instead of the exterior, it may not seem so harsh as it does now.

One might ask, Are the affections and the duties which spring from our domestic relations antagonistic to religion ? Are they so antagonistic that a man must set them aside in order to be a Christian according to the divine conception of religion ? They may be channels of religion ; or, they may be substitutes for religion—and that is an important distinction. If our affections and duties as children are all that there is, and if we make them a substitute for our duties to God and our own higher life, then these lower duties are mischiefs, they are snares ; but if we accept these affections and domestic duties as methods by which we reach up to a higher life, then they become harmonious and imperative.

Now, if Christ saw that this interposed duty on the part of the young man was really a shield, even though the man did not know it himself (we deceive ourselves unconsciously every day ; we are all the time shielding ourselves from duties by the plea of other duties, when we do not know it) ; if our Saviour saw that behind this most natural plea the young man was, after all, only preparing the way to get rid of conscience, to quench this new fire of aspiration, and to leave him, in this fact will be found a sufficient reason for the course which he pursued with him.

While the young man was in the Saviour's presence, it is doubtless true that a life of duty, the sense of obligation, and

the relations of the soul to God, shone radiantly upon him. The whole sense of character in him was illuminated. All the impulses of his nature were tending in the right direction. It was a moment for decision and for choice not to be neglected. He stood on the very verge of transition into a nobler and higher condition. If he had been strong, and if he had been confirmed in his right life, he could have gone to the burial of his father and returned, just as the disciples went to the Sea of Galilee and to their nets, and resumed their former occupations, until they were met by Christ once more, when they forsook all and followed him again. But if he was of an easy nature, if he was mutable in his disposition, if he was liable to ferment, if the uproar of an Oriental funeral would put out that spark, that lighted flame, which had just begun to glow, and he would forget the Teacher, and the things which he had been taught, and would resume his old life, and pass on, and fail of the great kingdom—then the best thing that could have been done for him was just that which the Saviour did.

So, then, as Jesus may have discriminated it, here was a man in danger of losing the highest ends of life by pleading a domestic duty. If we judge by the exterior, by conventional views, our Saviour's treatment of the case was hard; but if we judge by the interior; by the subtle and deceitful tendencies of the human soul, it was humane. The Lord took part with the man's interior manhood. He was a better friend to him than he was to himself. He said to him only this: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and its righteousness. That first. All other things will then come into play."

I have no doubt that if this young man had said to Jesus, "My father is dead, but my heart clings to thee and to thy ways, and I will leave to those who are at home the burial, and will follow thee"; I have no doubt that if the Saviour had seen that the young man's heart was fixed on this higher life, he would have said to him, "Return to thy father's house, and bury thy father, and then come and follow me": but discerning the other state—that with the beginnings of a noble ambition and aspiration, he was at just that point of choice where, unconsciously to himself, he desired to glide away from this obligation of the heart, and seized upon this occasion of natural duty, and said, "I will follow thee, but suffer me first to go and bury my father;" seeing that it was but an excuse and an abandonment of a higher and nobler career, he said to him, "Let those who care nothing for spiritual life, those who are at home, and immersed in the world, those who are spiritually dead—let them bury the dead. Thou, to whom has come for the first time this new thought, this glorious illumination, the open

heavens, and the accepted Teacher; thou, who hast springing up in thee the germs of this new and nobler life, confirm thyself in this purpose now, instantly; and let nothing turn thee aside from it."

There was no antagonism. It was a question of simply whether a man should use a natural affection and a natural duty for the sake of avoiding a higher manhood; whether he should interpose it as a shield and as an excuse.

I remark, then, first: Men may be attracted by the fruit of religion who will utterly abandon the pursuit of that fruit and of that religion when they see what the labor is which is required to obtain them. The scribe who came to our Master and said, "I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest," was answered, "No. You believe that that which is so beautiful in me and in my instruction, is super-eminently desirable; you wish to become my disciple; and you have an idea of a prosperity and increase of glory, consequent upon discipleship, that will never be realized. All you understand seems supremely good to you; but the moment you are put to the test, and are obliged to follow me through poverty, and reproach, and self-denial, you will hardly be able to purchase this life at the price which it will cost you."

We have a similar instance where the mother of Zebedee's children brought them to Christ, and said, "Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom"; and he said, "Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized withal? You want to rise in honor in my kingdom: can you pay the price of this elevation?" They did not even understand it.

The scribe desired to be a follower of Christ, with his eye upon mundane glory. He anticipated earthly advancement. And Christ said to him, substantially, "My kingdom is within. It is holiness of the heart. It is an affluence of true and disinterested love. It is transcendent goodness. It is the sweetness of spirituality. If you attempt to follow me you will stumble and fail on the very threshold. You cannot afford to pay the price of such fruit of holiness as you now admire, and are drawn toward."

A citizen goes into the market in high summer, and sees all the stalls loaded down with attractive vegetables and luscious fruits. On every side they glow. Their odor fills the air. He is attracted to them. He says to himself, "Beautiful! Gardening is the most delightful occupation of a man's life; and I am bound to do one thing: I will sell all I have in the city, and will move to the country, and will have a garden. Just look at these vegetables and this

fruit!" He goes and buys his ground, and moves into the country. And the summer goes, as well as he. The weather grows hotter and hotter. And the man takes his spade and line and rake and hoe, and goes out into his garden to prepare the beds for his vegetables. But before he has wrought a week he begins to feel that, after all, vegetables are not so important to a man's life. Vegetables gathered and spread out in Fulton Market are delicious, and pleasing to behold; but vegetables in a man's garden, if he has got to work and toil for weeks, and months, and all summer, to raise them, cost he thinks, more than they come to. You will hear men who have gone to the country, and have, after trying farming a little while, come back to the city, tell about potatoes that cost them a dollar apiece!

A man fascinated with the idea of raising fruit, goes to the country and sets out his orchards with bright anticipations as to the result. But no sooner have his trees got well started than all nature becomes his tormentor. The frost blasts the blossoms. The worms gnaw the roots. The insects sting both blossoms and roots. And when he has toiled year after year, and brought his trees into such a state that he thinks he is going to have a profusion of delicious fruit, the black wart seizes his plum-trees, and the gum-canker attacks his cherry-trees, and the winter-blight kills his pear trees, and his apple-trees will not bear anyhow; and at last, disgusted with raising fruit, he comes back to the city, and says, "I prefer, after all, that other people should be my pomologists. I have had enough of gardening."

People go to the house of God, and hear the chanting and singing, and hear the reading from the Word of God, and see the tranquil faces of the worshipers, and listen to the serene voice that speaks of the higher life; and they feel drawn to this higher life; and they say, "I will follow Christ; I will be a Christian; I will live a religious life." But the next day, when they attempt to follow Christ, there comes the conflict with selfishness—and that, too, in its most vulgar and provoking forms; the conflict with pride, in its most annoying methods; the conflict with temper, in its most flagitious moods; conflicts of every sort in society. It seems to them as though they had thrown themselves into a hedge of thorns; and they say, "This is more than I bargained for: I wanted religion." Yes, you wanted religion, just as Naaman wanted to be healed, who said,

"I thought, he will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean?"

Multitudes are drawn to religion by the poetry and effluence and beauty of its last stages, and are kindled to enthusiasm by them, and long to realize them in their own experience; but the toil, the yoke, the burden, the cross, they abhor. These do not enter into their anticipation.

One may be kept or led away from the pursuits of a religious life by things which are innocent in themselves, which are right, and which are even in the nature of indispensable duties and humanities. Is a true religious life, then, inconsistent with secular duties? No. With domestic duties? No. With civil duties? No. Indeed, industrial life, domestic life, social life, and civil life, are institutions of spiritual culture. It is by these, and through them, that we are developed into a higher religious state. And yet, it is true that a man may be kept from spirituality by these indispensable secular duties. It is so because it is necessary that there should be harmony and subordination. It is not enough that a man simply does right things. They must be done in right proportions and in the right order.

A kind soul, being childless, adopts a group of children, and brings them to her house, and proposes to give them an education, and to develop them into a nobler citizenship. But, being extremely domestic, she bestows her strength on their bodily wants. She rises early, and sits up late, and sees that they are cleanly in person, and well clad. Her fingers ply the ready needle incessantly. And they are properly fed and taken care of. She devotes herself so completely to the providing of their clothes and food, to the supplying of their physical wants, that her energies are utterly exhausted, and she has none to spend on anything besides. It is so to-day, and to-morrow, and the next day, and continually. She is all the time shoeing them, and clothing them, and feeding them, and putting them to bed, and taking them up again, and cleansing them. She is all the while caring for their bodies. She thinks perpetually, "They must be educated; their minds must be cultivated; but she has no time for instructing them. All her time is consumed upon their lower necessities."

Now, I ask, whether this 'looking after the physical wants of these children does not supersede something still higher. Although these things ought to be done, ought not the others to be done also? If there is to be any relativeness, any preference as to time, is it not to be in accordance with our Master's declaration:

"Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness?"

That turns everything bottom side up. You do not believe it.

Nature does not believe it. Every man says, "Let me first get a foothold in this world; let me build up a good business; let me establish myself; and as soon as I am once successful, I mean to be religious." The Master says, "That is the order of nature. That sprang from the earth; and the forces that spring from the earth are strongest and most importunate. But in my kingdom the law is to seek first the kingdom of God; to seek first spiritual things, as the highest things; to seek first righteousness, and all its multitudinous contents. God, the Invisible; love; faith; hope; divine obedience—seek these first. Then all those other things shall be added unto you. They will come by natural sequence."

He who touches the highest, touches all that is below it; though he who touches the lowest, does not touch all that is above it. Things are so wrought together, in the providence of God, that the higher elements carry the lower, though the lower could not carry the higher.

There are those who are perpetually putting as an excuse before their own minds indispensable duties, pre-occupation. One has no time for religion, because home duties are so onerous. As if religion was not that very element in which home duties are buoyed up, and in which they swim, as the boat swims upon the sea! As if one were not fitted to contest with poverty and to work who has the supernal inspiration and joy and hope of a higher atmosphere above him! As if a man were not more competent to buffet care if he have new realms of spiritual intelligence than if he live in a lower sphere! And yet, persons are perpetually putting duties in the way of their spiritual development. *Suffer me first*, is a barrier strong enough to prevent men, all their life long, from following Christ. It is not that you desire wrong things; it is not that you desire to avoid right things; but you say, "Suffer me first to do the inferior, and then I will be ready for the superior. Suffer me first to take care of myself. Suffer me first to take care of my household. Suffer me first to take care of my business. Suffer me first to take care of my party. Suffer me first to take care of this enterprise, and then —." No! This constant habit of humbling the higher, and making it subordinate to the lower; this constant preference of the inferior to the superior, works demoralization. A man does not need to throw away his Bible, nor defy his God, nor sell his soul voluntarily. He only needs to say, "Suffer me first to do this lesser thing." The moment that is done, there will be another "Suffer me first" in its place. And so we shall put the inferior duties in the place of higher duties, and go through life, and fail at last. No matter what it is, there is nothing on earth that should

occupy so high a place in your affections as your own spiritual regenerated manhood; your own faith in Christ; your duty toward God; your own security in the land of immortality. The things which are highest to you are the things which deserve to be first; and it is a blight on your higher duties to put your lower duties in the place of them. It is a violation of the true order of spiritual nature.

It is not enough that we approve, admire, and desire things that are right, true and religious. We must desire them more than we desire anything else. The desire for them must be the strongest desire. I apprehend that there are no persons in the world who do not desire the best things; but you know that there are very few persons in the world who desire them more than they do anything else. The lazy man desires the fruit of industry; but he does not desire it at the price of working. There are other things which he desires more than that. The truant school-boy desires to be learned; but alas! he does not desire to study. He wishes he knew his arithmetic lesson; but he wishes a great deal more that he knew what is in that blue-bird's nest in that tree; and he will go and see if he can get a chance. There is a desire on his part in either direction, though it is stronger in one direction than in the other. A man desires virtue, only it is so hard to be virtuous. A man desires to be moral; but the ten thousands little seductive steps by which he leans toward self-indulgence are stronger than his wish to be a pure and noble man. I think that even selfish and greedy men desire to be benevolent. If you could throw benevolence over them as a garment, they would like it. If you could take out of them their selfishness and sordidness, they would like that. Many times they are conscious of their bondage; but while they desire to exchange a heart of selfishness for a heart of benevolence, they desire something more than that. That is not their strongest desire. It is not first, either in point of time, or in point of strength. It has no priority, and no supereminent intensity. When we see men pursuing second, third and fourth-rate courses, they desire these more than better ones.

Men say, "I am not so very bad. I see what is right, and approve of it. I believe in the Bible, in the Sabbath-day, and in good people. My mother was a good, praying Christian; and I have often wished that I was like her; and I mean to be, some time. I do not always intend to be what I am now. I would not have you think that I have not my own thoughts about religion. I tell you, I have many serious hours. I really wish I was a Christian." I know it; but you wish you were not a great deal more. You wish you were

a Christian in generics; but in every specific you wish you were not. That is, as each particular duty comes up before you from day to day, doing it right means to be a Christian; doing it wrong means not to be one; and you do it wrong, and prefer to do it wrong. You think of yourself; you lay out your life so that it shall minister to your own enjoyment; and thus you violate the law of love. You desire to do things which are customary and worldly and selfish. The desire of self-indulgence is your strongest desire. A man may be a very good man in his imagination, who is a very poor man in his practice.

Oh! what pictures there would be, if I could only take the trouble to learn to paint the things that I dream about! Such frescoes! Such magnificent renderings of magnificent scenes! Such portraitures! The trouble is, that while my imagination is fruitful enough, it is a shiftless and careless fruitfulness, and it never comes down lower than that, and dies in the nest where it was born. I think of things, and turn them over, and turn them over, and make pictures, and forget them, and make pictures, and forget them; but I am not an artist. An artist is a man whose wishes get down through his shoulders to his fingers; and he *makes* what he wishes he was going to make. He *does*. He turns into account that which would otherwise die as smoke or cloud. Men of revery are like clouds that never rain. Men of function shower down resolutions in the form of drops, and results spring up from them.

It is not enough that a man should say, "I admire the character of Christ; I admire the precepts of religion; I admire every Christian man or woman who is fulfilling what seems to him or her to be the spirit of religion. I never see such persons that I do not wish that I was like them."

There are persons who sit lingering wistfully here. Do you know how curious birds are? When you go into a field without racket or violence, and sit down with little birds, or anything that concerns them, all the birds of the thicket around about you, after a while, will begin to fly a little nearer, and a little nearer, and look down, and watch to see what is going on. I have seen birds in the galleries here on Communion days who were doing the same thing; one hovering there, and another yonder, and leaning over the balustrades to see what was going on at the Communion table. A great many of them think very serious things. Many of them, as they sit there, and look down, think of father and mother; and they can almost hear them speaking out of the air, and saying, "O thou wandering child! thou shouldest be down there among them." Persons look over there and say, "When she was dying, she made me

promise that I would become a Christian ; but I have never done it." People undergo penances with a sort of relish. Their conscience has a kind of atonement in it. Many men and women stand looking upon a congregation like this in the act of supreme worship or consecration ; and the beauty of holiness seems beautiful indeed to them ; and they go away with downcast face and sympathetic heart ; and when they get home they say, " I tell you, that sermon did me good to-day. I am glad I went to that church." Oh, yes ; but that sermon will be like water spilled upon the sand. It will moisten it, and drain away, and to-morrow neither grass nor flower will show where the drops fell. It ministers to nothing. You approved of the sermon ; you felt sympathetic with it ; you desired that which it set forth ; you longed for it ; but you longed for something else a great deal more.

There are those in my presence who have been here for years and years. They are cultured, intelligent men, and men full of domestic excellence, according to the worldly scale of goodness. They always have meant to be better. They have fashioned to themselves the higher life. They have yearned for the faith of Jesus Christ. Sometimes by teaching, and sometimes by living examples, they have looked upon this glorious higher life, and longed for it, and meant to have it, and passed on, and formed the habit of passing on ; and it appears as though they would pass on to the very end. They seem to be spending their life in desiring to follow Christ, and never following him. They are always saying, " Suffer me first to go and take care of Monday, and then I will follow thee ;" until Tuesday morning, when they say, " Lord, suffer me first to take care of Tuesday." And then it is, " Lord, suffer me first to take care of Wednesday, and then I will return and worship thee." And it is the same on Thursday and Friday, and every day. It is this week and next week ; this month and next month ; this year and next year. And in the time of sorrow, it is, " When this shall have passed away I will serve thee ;" and in the time of joy, it is, " When this shall have passed, I will begin." When business presses, it is, " I will take a vacation, and then I will attend to my religious duties ;" and in vacation time, it is, " I am so tired out and unstrung that there is no use of my beginning now." There is always some reason pleaded by men for deferring, avoiding, not fulfilling those duties which the voice of conscience urges upon them. This laying hold, really, by faith, upon the Lord Jesus Christ, is the thing that is never done.

There is not one single part of your successful life that does not rebuke your Christian life. You know that in secular matters

nothing is ever done until desire ripens to preference, and preference ripens to choice. If you have succeeded in anything in this life, it is because at last choice was confirmed, and you concentrated your energies on the desirable thing, and obtained it. No man ever took hold of a godly life as men take hold of a secular life, and followed it up with such persistence as men employ in a secular life, that he did not, by augmenting knowledge and progressive steps, rise to the realm of spirituality and religion.

What men need most, is not that their imagination should go unilluminated, and is not that they should abandon secular activities, but that their strongest love, their highest conception of manhood, should be in the direction of subordinating the inferior to the superior developments of the soul, and that they should say, "I will seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness." I am sure that the man who does that will find all desirable things added to him.

I beseech you, lingerers, procrastinators, you that have surveyed the sweet and flowery fields of Christianity; you that have looked over into the garden of the Lord; you that have smelled the fragrance which has issued from a godly life, look not on it any longer simply with the eyes of desire. *Choose* ye this day whom ye will serve. If the Lord be God, and your God, serve him. Choose! Let the day of these vapid, formless, ineffectual thoughts and yearnings and aspirations cease. Put no value upon them. Do not deceive yourselves in supposing that they, if not entirely religious, are almost religion. That is a religious life which has bones in it, and muscles on the bones, and flesh clothing the muscles. A religious life has also an animated soul in it; and that soul is to desire and prefer and choose the highest and best things. And when you shall have chosen God above all others as your portion, and the life of a true spiritual obedience as the highest form of life, that choice should dominate everything else. Then you will indeed have entered upon a new life.

May God grant that some of you who have hitherto been saying, "Master, suffer me first to go and bury my father," may say, at last, "I will follow thee though my father and my mother are dead, or dying; though my house is in flames; though my friends are alienated; though my possessions are scattered. Thou art the chiefest among ten thousand, and altogether lovely." This is the natural expression in the supremest moment of love. There is nothing on earth that can compare with that which you love, and that to which you submit the whole obedience and enthusiasm of your soul. And if the love be supernal and divine, and take hold upon the majesty and symmetry and infinite excellence of God, it surely will ride

over everything else. Allegiance to God first, and then, in sweet and transparent beauty, in their order and growth, all other duties will come in their natural place. God lead you to make the right choice. *Amen.*



PRAYER BEFORE THE SERMON.

We bless thee, our heavenly Father, for thy great condescension. For all the manifestations which thou hast made of thyself in nature, we thank thee. Dim are our eyes, and undiscerning our hearts. We have looked upon the way of nature, and, undirected, we can behold there no God. We have looked upon thy way of providence, and clouds and darkness have been around about it. And we are glad when thou dost send forth an interpreting Friend by whose life and disposition we are permitted to learn of thy life and thy disposition; by whose words we learn of thee. We thank thee for Jesus, the Beloved, who is to us in thy place an interpreter of thee; so that all the thoughts which we compass and compress under thy revered name are borrowed or quickened of him. We rejoice that we are permitted to give our hearts to him; that it is not idolatry to worship him by love; that we withhold nothing from thy throne which we confer upon his heart; that he stands for thee and for us; and that in him we meet, Father and children. And we pray that we may accept the blessedness of this interpretation, the joy that is in Christ, with simple faith and childlike trust. May we look to him for direction. May we know what is the spirit of Christ, by which we are to become like him. May we be taught to move from day to day in the same spirit and along the same path, knowing that thus in finding him we find ourselves, and reach our true manhood, unknown and hidden from us in him.

We thank thee, O Lord Jesus, for thy faithfulness; for the wonder of thy love, which spends itself in supervising such a globe as this, with such creatures as dwell upon it. We rejoice that thou art such a One, and that thy being runs forth from sight illimitable and incomprehensible. Thou art giving thyself forever and forever for thy creatures. Thou art the unwasting loaf; and all the universe doth feed upon thee. Thou art the light; and all the universe is quickened to behold and to travel thitherward. And though there is much that we cannot compass nor understand, we rejoice that we leave that to the interpretation of a future experience. We rejoice that all that concerns us—our strength, our growth, our duty, our triumph in life, our triumph over death, and our entrance upon immortality—is made known to us. May we be like little children, and follow the voice of love, and the footsteps which are marked out for us. May we hear thee saying to us, to-day, "Come unto me, and I will give thee rest." But may we also hear thee saying, "Take my burden and my yoke upon you." May we not seek thee except by the way of the burden and of the yoke. May we not seek thee a Prince and a Saviour, except by the cross whereon thou wert glorified in sacrifice. May we desire to be like unto thee, and to live in that which is noblest, and purest, and truest, and best, for time and for eternity. May we count no thorn too sharp, no sorrow too deep, no tears too many, that shall lead us unto this higher life, and keep us there.

We beseech of thee, O Lord, thou most patient One, who hast borne with us, and forgiven us, that thou wilt still bear with us and forgive us. We do

not entreat thee as though thou didst need to be entreated to forgive our sins; for thou dost forgive us out of thine own goodness. And our very asking is of thee. Thou art breathing into us, and stirring in us more and more a generous wish for perfection. And we pray that thou wilt guide every aspiration which thou dost excite. Wilt thou grant that all those emotions and all those choices by which we are led into the religious life may be conserved of God. Though, as we pray for outward protection and for providential mercies from day to day, we do not understand how to pray for them, may we have the greater blessing of the Spirit, the inward love, the joy of thy salvation, the realization of the invisible power and might of things that are not.

We pray that thou wilt, this morning, draw near to all thy people, according to the several circumstances in which they are placed. May those who come rejoicing, cheered with the light of hope, pour out their thanksgiving before God. May those who come saddened by troubles and sorrows find a blessed forgetfulness here of sorrow, in the communion which they are permitted to hold with thee. We pray that burdens may be laid down here, not to be taken up again. We pray that men may part from evil here, never again to embrace it. Here may our souls rise into such communion with thee that the fragrance shall abide with us. We pray that thou wilt give strength to the weak, and comfort to the disconsolate, and courage to the depressed, and guidance to those who are perplexed. We pray that thou wilt give heart-rest to those who have heartache. We pray, if there are any who are friendless, and who turn every whither for sympathy and find it not, that thou wilt fill their hearts full of God's mercy and love towards them; and if guilt and fear rise up into their souls and cast out the comfort of believing that thou dost care for them, grant that there may be such a predominate vision of the love of God to sinners that even sinners may dare to trust thy mercy and thy love.

We pray that those who are strangers in our midst in a strange land may find here the joy of a Christian home. May this day be to them as the Gate Beautiful of the whole week. We pray that thou wilt grant unto them, and to all those who need it, this day, such divine grace and succor that their hearts shall cry out with gratitude and with confessions of thy mercy. Thus, Lord, we pray that thou wilt show thyself to be a God of goodness in this great congregation.

We commend to thee those who cannot speak their sorrows; those who have a hidden life of trouble; those who have sorrows which spring from germs which they know not of. We commend to thee all who are in want. Thou that didst create the eye—canst thou not see? Thou that didst create the soul—canst thou not understand its throbbings and mute, inarticulate wants? We commend to thy mercy and love all thy creatures. Thou that art the Father of fathers, thou that hast taught the mother how to love, thou from whom we learned all that we understand of disinterested love, put forth thine arms over men everywhere. As the light, and as the seasons embrace the continents, and pour out warmth upon the earth, and bring a summer of joy and love upon ten thousand things, so, to-day, uncover thy bosom, and reach out the summer of thy heart upon all those who stand around about waiting for thy coming blessing. And we pray that all of us may rise into such a thought of thee that God shall be to us a mountain of strength, a tower, a refuge, all in all.

Bless with us those who are gathered together everywhere to worship thee to-day. Strengthen thy servants according to the revelations of thy Spirit, to speak the word of truth. Unite thy people more and more. Bind them together in indivisible bonds of love and trust. Spread out over thy sanctuaries the light and strength of thy Spirit everywhere.

May our laws and institutions be purified. May our magistrates be uncorrupt, God-fearing men. Bless the President of these United States, and those that are associated with him in authority. Give them thine own wisdom. Lead them in all truth and fidelity. And remember all the Governors of the States, and all judges, and all teachers, and all those who labor for the welfare of others in obscure and humble places.

We pray for all crowned heads, that kings may rule wisely and deal justly. We pray for all the governments of the earth, that they may become ameliorated, and be more and more humane. We pray for the people. We pray for the great multitude that are friendless, and neglected, and sunk, and sinking, and that have no hope in life, and little of the life that is to come.

Stir up thyself, O Lord, thou God of all our mercies. See how in all the earth thou hast forgotten to be gracious. Shall we judge thee by our ignorance? We know not the mystery of thy neglect, nor the mystery of thy mercies conferred; but we pray, O Lord Jesus Christ, that as the field is the world, and as thou didst die to redeem it, we may see the steps of redemption, and the witness that thou hast not forgotten those who seem neglected and outcast. Bring in, at last, that day of promise when all shall know thee from the greatest unto the least.

And to the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, shall be immortal praises.
Amen.

PRAYER AFTER THE SERMON.

Our Father, wilt thou bless the word spoken. Help us to draw out of that word all true honey as from the honeycomb. We pray that thou wilt help us to fulfill that which we know. May we not linger and hover over thoughts of right and duty with fond desire and approval. May we be stirred up to realization. And so may we live that when at last all earthly scenes shall have passed away, we shall not have lived in vain. May we have that anchor of hope which entereth within the veil, sure and steadfast. And when at last we are brought home, grant that it may be in that stormless land, in that sky without a sun and yet radiant, where thou art, and where no other need be, for teaching, and for food, and for joy. And to thy name shall be the praise forever and ever. *Amen.*

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
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